

2005 Fall Outlook



VARIETY IN HUNTING...

By Randy Kreil

The long-standing motto of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is “Variety in Hunting and Fishing.” This simple yet telling statement has always had a prominent place on Department stationery, business cards, publications, and on every mailing envelope sent out by staff. These five words summarize why many people chose to live in North Dakota and why each fall thousands of visitors come to the state.

To some, such a motto would seem inappropriate for a state that is basically rectangular in shape and deemed uniformly flat by most outsiders and more than a few residents. While it may be true that our ethnic and cultural diversity is limited, our social and political standards less than divergent, and our definition of spicy food ends at too much salt and butter, there are other things that add spice to living in North Dakota.

Contrary to what some people would have you believe, and what seems to be the case at first glance, our state is a dynamic and ever-changing place. This vibrancy arises from the basic ecology and geology of North Dakota. Where we live is a newly changed place in a geological sense. The glaciers, which determined landscape features of our state, receded only 10,000 years ago – a very short time when measured geologically. The prairie potholes, badlands, Turtle Mountains and Red River Valley are all artifacts of this recent geology that forms the basis for subtle, yet distinctive variety that defines North Dakota.

In addition to variation of habitat types, these “youthful” qualities directly contribute to the incredible productivity found in soils, wetlands and forests of our state. This productivity expresses itself in profitable agriculture and abundant wildlife, which are North Dakota’s fundamental strengths.

A variety in habitat types – from the rugged up and down badlands pictured here, to the much flatter Red River Valley – contribute to the diversity that defines North Dakota.

More readily apparent and recognizable are extremes in climate conditions we see from year to year. The rapid and unpredictable changes – from drought to conditions so wet that people sketch plans for building an ark – add to the dynamic nature of the landscape. The fact that we experience four distinct seasons also contributes to this climatic diversity. All this climate change, when added to our geologic variations, creates a wide range of plant communities and habitat types that support an incredible array of wildlife.

Habitat types in North Dakota range from aspen woodlands of the northeast to the sagebrush prairies of the southwest; from tallgrass prairies of the Sheyenne National Grassland to the harsh and rugged beauty of the Little Missouri National Grassland; and from the fertile soils of the Red River Valley to the productive wetlands of the Prairie Pothole Region. This range of habitat produces a collection of wildlife that provides the basis for the variety in hunting and fishing we so often proclaim.

A combination of favorable weather and habitat conditions will make fall 2005 another good season for people who seek a variety of hunting experiences. Big game hunters will see yet another deer season with more than 140,000 licenses. Pronghorn have rebounded well since the devastating winter of 1996-97, when nearly 75 percent of the state's population either died or migrated elsewhere. This year we made a record number of pronghorn licenses available.

Waterfowl numbers in the state look good, and habitat conditions on southern Canadian prairies have been good to excellent, improving odds for a good migration of geese and ducks through the state during October and November. Upland game bird numbers may be similar to last year, however, there is some concern over extreme, widespread wet conditions when adult birds were nesting and rearing young. Wet conditions during these critical periods could influence the number of young birds available in fall.

Finally, the variety in hunting opportunities for fall will include the state's first experimental, quota-based mountain lion season, and the second limited prairie chicken season in six decades.

For those people who like variety in their hunting experiences and are willing to work at it, the makings are there for a very good fall indeed.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Stan Kohn

Upland Game Management Biologist

A string of several mild winters – 2004-05 included – has been beneficial to North Dakota's ring-necked pheasant population. With that in mind, good hunting this fall is expected in south central and southeastern North Dakota. Pheasants should be plentiful along the Missouri River System and in traditional areas south of Interstate 94.

Spring crowing counts showed good numbers of breeding birds throughout much of the pheasant range. Nesting cover in spring was poor in many areas because of a lack of snow and rain. The dry conditions changed, however, as all areas of the state experienced heavy rains in spring and during the peak of the pheasant hatch.

Reproduction of young birds was not known by early summer, making it difficult to predict chick survival. Even so, Game and Fish Department biologists received positive preliminary reports from summer brood surveys. This is a good sign, and if reproduction and brood survival is average – there is more quality brood cover now than in many years – pheasants maybe found in numbers similar to last year, but probably not as good as 2003.

Last fall, North Dakota hunters bagged slightly fewer birds than in 2003, but the total harvest was still close to 600,000. These last two years were the best pheasant seasons since the late 1940s.



CRAIG BIRLE

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

Gerald Kobriger

*Upland Game Management Supervisor
Dickinson*

The Pat, unfortunately, is not back.

Last year's outlook reported Hungarian partridge numbers slowly climbing, with good increases the previous few years. The harvest in 2003 was more than 90,000 birds, the highest in many years. But Huns apparently hit a wall again last year and numbers tumbled.

While average brood size in 2004 was unchanged from 2003, the number of broods observed fell nearly 40 percent. Hunter numbers dropped as well, by more than 25 percent from 2003 to 2004. Harvest in 2004 was down more than 40 percent from 2003.

Resident partridge hunters took most of their birds in north central North Dakota, with nearly 30 percent of the harvest in Ward, Mountrail, Bottineau and McLean counties. Nonresidents likely took most of their partridge while pheasant hunting. Their top counties were Dickey, McIntosh, Hettinger, Slope, Bowman and Emmons, contributing to nearly 40 percent of the 2004 nonresident partridge harvest.

Rural mail carriers, in cooperation with Game and Fish, count Hungarian partridge seen on routes during a three-day period in April. The 2005 numbers indicated a decline in birds spotted of more than 22 percent.

WILD TURKEYS

Stan Kohn

Conditions are right for North Dakota's fall turkey population to improve over last year, leading to better hunting in 2005.

Many hunters had a difficult time shooting a wild turkey last fall. The turkey population in many southwestern counties was down from previous years due to dry conditions, which led to poor reproduction.

Last fall, 10,980 wild turkey licenses were issued to North Dakota residents. A total of 8,064 hunters harvested 3,773 birds for a success rate of 47 percent. This was a record number of active hunters (previous high was 5,234 in 2003) and a record harvest (previous high was 3,607 in 1988). Hunters had the best success in central and southeastern parts of the state. Turkey licenses are issued by lottery with the number of licenses issued in each unit determined by the wild turkey population.

Winter was mild so turkey survival was good, and the recent rains, especially in the southwest, have produced some excellent nesting and brood habitat. Over the years, we have adjusted turkey unit boundaries, added new turkey units, and opened the entire state to hunting during fall of 2003 to increase opportunities for hunters.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Gerald Kobriger

The potential exists for a good year for sharp-tailed grouse. Above-average precipitation experienced in mid-summer means more cover for birds. Plus, temperatures during the critical brood rearing period were not as cool as last year, so survival of young should be better.

Just when we thought hunters were returning to grassland areas to pursue North Dakota's top native upland game bird, the trend in 2004 went the other way. While predictions for last season were not rosy, it was still expected to be a fairly good one. Hunters, however, must have concentrated on the negative and either didn't hunt sharp-tailed grouse, or pursued other game.

Resident hunter numbers last year dropped more than 23 percent, from more than 29,000 to just over 22,300. The word must have spread out of state as nonresident hunter numbers tumbled nearly 35 percent.

Total harvest for sharptails dropped more than 30 percent from nearly 150,000 birds in 2003 to just over 100,000 in 2004. Success per hunter declined, but not significantly, from 3.7 grouse per season in 2003 to 3.5 birds in 2004. Hunters averaged a grouse per hunting trip last year, again just slightly down from 1.1 birds per trip in 2003.

Thanks to another fairly mild winter in 2004-05, the native sharptails came through in pretty good shape. Spring counts were expected to be down – and they were – due to low production last year. But the decrease was less than expected. Overall, counts dipped about 8 percent from the previous year. Declines were noted in all areas and ranged from about 10 percent in the southwest and central portions of the state, to about 5 percent along the breaks of the Missouri River.

The grasslands should be in good shape this fall so enjoy a hike, appreciate the autumn colors, and top it off with a frying pan of sharptails.

SAGE GROUSE

Gerald Kobriger

Rains that started in early spring and continued through summer greatly improved habitat conditions in the sagebrush range. This should translate into good production and a good year for sage grouse.

Sage grouse numbers in southwestern North Dakota were up this spring. On 15 active strutting grounds, 225 male sage grouse were counted. Last year, 144 grouse were counted on 16 active grounds. Wet, windy conditions prevailed during counts this year and some small grounds may have been missed.

More good news on the sage grouse scene is that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ruled that the greater sage grouse did not warrant listing as an endangered or threatened species. That does not mean that sage grouse planning and conservation will go to the back burner.

The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Greater Sage Grouse in North Dakota will be completed this year. The Department's private land management team has already started work with landowners in sage grouse range to protect and improve sagebrush habitat.

Hunter numbers for sage grouse were down 46 percent last fall. Part of the decline can be attributed to the season being delayed two weeks from previous years. Hunters had better success, however. In 2003, only 14 sage grouse were harvested by 185 hunters. In 2004, 100 hunters bagged 28 birds. In both years, hunters averaged slightly over 1.5 trips per individual.

RUFFED GROUSE

Stan Kohn

If you want a break from hunting the prairie, try pursuing this nifty woodland grouse. Ruffed grouse are primarily found in the native aspen woodlands of Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh, Cavalier and portions of McHenry counties.

Forty years of census data in North Dakota indicate ruffed grouse numbers cycle about every 8-10 years. Currently, we are at the low point in the population. Harvest numbers took a big drop in 2004, with only 249 birds taken, compared to 1,830 in 2003. Likewise, the number of hunters in 2004 was down about 50 percent from 2003.

The ruffed grouse population may still be at the low point in its cycle, but there are some indications that things are about to improve. Drumming count surveys in spring indicated the number of displaying males increased about 37 percent from 2004. As with all species, habitat is the key. A good mixture of young and old aspen trees, with a thick shrub understory of beaked hazel, will improve nesting success and brood survival.

Ruffed grouse hunting nearly ends each year when snow blankets the forest. That can be early in North Dakota, and frequently several months of the season may be left with virtually no one hunting these superb birds. Regardless of where their numbers fall within the 10-year population cycle, many hunters do not consider their hunting season complete without at least one trip to the grouse woods in fall.

Hunters willing to burn some boot leather will find a variety of upland game birds on North Dakota's diverse landscape.



DUCKS AND GEESE

Mike Johnson

Game Management Section Leader

The fall flight of ducks is expected to be improved from last year, and similar to 1999-2000, which hunters will likely remember with fondness. Helping matters are better water conditions in Canada – up 56 percent from last year and 17 percent above the long-term average.

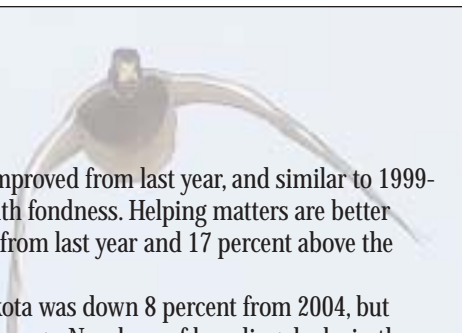
The 2005 spring water index in North Dakota was down 8 percent from 2004, but remained 21 percent above the 1948-2004 average. Numbers of breeding ducks in the state remained high. The 2005 duck index was down 4 percent from 2004, but still exceeded the long-term average by 100 percent, making it the seventh highest on record.

Indices for many duck species were up or showed no change. The most notable declines from 2004 were seen in gadwall (14 percent fall) and mallards (10 percent). All species except pintail remained above the 1948-2004 average. The index for mallards, though lower than 2004, was 121 percent above the long-term average and was the eighth highest on record.

Most of North Dakota received considerable rainfall since mid-May, replenishing wetland levels. The south central portion of the state may be less wet. While this jump in water levels was too late to significantly affect breeding duck distribution, it certainly helped hens in renesting efforts, and improved brood survival. The remarkable wet cycle, which began in the summer of 1993, appears to be continuing, as the statewide wetland index remains more than 20 percent above the long-term average.

Despite large populations of ducks and good production, fall weather always plays a major role in hunting success. We will have to wait and see what October brings, and when freeze-up occurs in North Dakota.

Resident Canada goose numbers in North Dakota remain high, so the Game and Fish Department is able to continue the state's early September hunting season. In 2004, an estimated 6,720 hunters harvested 24,930 Canada geese during the early season, which runs September 1-15, compared to 6,870 hunters and 20,500 birds in 2003.



SANDHILL CRANES

Mike Szymanski

The spring population index for the Mid-Continent Sandhill Crane Population continues to remain relatively stable. Even so, it's too early to predict the fall flight into North Dakota. Weather and hunting pressure throughout the migration corridor will dictate when birds arrive.

North Dakota's two unit structure for sandhill cranes will continue. Unit 1, west of U.S. Highway 281, has a season length of 58 days and a daily bag limit of three cranes, whereas Unit 2, east of U.S. Highway 281, has a season length of 37 days and a daily bag limit of two birds. This year, nonresident hunters will be able to pursue these wary birds with either a nonresident small game or waterfowl license. Hunters using a nonresident waterfowl license must stay in the waterfowl zones dictated by their license. Hunters are also reminded to be sure of their target before shooting, as endangered whooping cranes may be present throughout North Dakota this fall. Please report all whooping crane sightings to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck at 328-6300.

MOURNING DOVES

Mike Szymanski

Migratory Game Bird Biologist

The mourning dove opener, barring cooler weather than average prior to September 1, should be as good, if not better, than last fall.

Last year's hard frost across the state in August pushed many doves south well before the season began. However, isolated concentrations of birds did persevere for successful dove hunts in some areas.

Numbers of doves heard on roadside surveys in May were similar to last year's counts. Weather patterns that do not create cool nighttime temperatures will be critical in dictating how many doves hunters will encounter during the first few weeks of September.

A three-year mourning dove banding study continues across the country and in North Dakota. Hunters are reminded to take a look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to the Bird Banding Laboratory at 800-327-BAND (2263).



WHITE-TAILED DEER

Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist

Following another mild winter, fall 2005 is shaping up to be another banner year for white-tailed deer hunters.

Winter aerial surveys and hunter observations suggest high deer numbers along a line running diagonally from southwestern North Dakota to the northeastern corner of the state, with reduced deer numbers in northwestern and southeastern North Dakota. In response to high deer numbers in selected units, 145,600 deer gun licenses are available to hunters this fall.

The long-term goal is to reduce overall deer numbers so that about 100,000 licenses will maintain a relatively stable population. To work toward this goal, the majority of licenses made available in recent years have been for antlerless deer.

With the increasing popularity of electronic applications over the Internet, license processing is becoming faster and more efficient. Hunters with second and third (or more) doe licenses can hunt early, late and often. These licenses can be used during the archery season with a bow; deer gun season with a bow, rifle or muzzle-loader; or during



RON WILSON

A record number of deer licenses – mostly for white-tailed does – were again made available to hunters in 2005.

the muzzle-loader season with a muzzle-loader. These licenses must be used for antlerless deer only, and hunters must stay in the unit to which the license is assigned.

Despite an August frost in 2004 that resulted in a lot of standing corn in late November, and wet conditions delaying the sunflower

harvest, overall gun hunter success last year was about 74 percent. During a special season in December, an additional 7,700 antlerless deer were harvested. Success rates for both archery – 39 percent – and muzzle-loader – 48 percent – were slightly above average.



CRAIG BIRHLE

MULE DEER

Bruce Stillings

*Big Game Management Biologist
Dickinson*

North Dakota's mule deer population has been on the rise since the mid-1990s, and hunters will, for the third year in a row, see increased hunting opportunities.

The number of mule deer gun licenses was increased from 6,375 in 2004 to 7,700 in 2005.

The 2004 fall survey indicated good production, with 88 fawns per 100 does, and a healthy buck-to-doe ratio of 46 bucks per 100 does. The 2005 spring index in the badlands was just under 10 mule deer per square mile and well above the long-term average of six deer per square mile.

Mule deer hunters had a successful 2004. Hunter success was 82 percent for bucks and 84 percent for does.

North Dakota's mule deer population continues to climb.

MOOSE

Roger Johnson,
Big Game Supervisor, Devils Lake

North Dakota's fall moose season, featuring 129 licenses, should be similar to 2004 when 135 license holders harvested 116 moose for an 87 percent success rate.

Snow conditions during 2004-05 only allowed moose surveys in the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mountains. The survey indicated a slight decrease in moose numbers in these areas, but increases on the prairie have stabilized moose license numbers. Moose permits in Unit M10, north and west of Minot, were increased from 15 to 20.

During summer, there were reports of moose along the Missouri River near Bismarck and the Williston area. Continued expansion of moose across the state will likely result in expanded moose hunting areas in the future.

To try to determine the cause of moose population declines in timbered areas of the state, the Department helped fund a project with the University of North Dakota, where 10 animals were fitted with radio transmitters. Five moose in the Turtle Mountains and five in the prairie area of Lonetree Wildlife Management Area are featured in the study. Information from the study will help biologists better manage this unique species in North Dakota.

PRONGHORN

Bruce Stillings

North Dakota's pronghorn population has recovered nicely since the tough winter of 1996-97, from a low of 4,000 in 1998 to nearly 15,000 animals in 2005.

Several mild winters, coupled with a conservative harvest strategy, have helped pronghorn populations reach objectives in all management regions west of the Missouri River. As a result, North Dakota hunters will have more opportunities than ever this fall to hunt pronghorn. The number of gun licenses available this year is 5,715, an increase of 3,205 from 2004.

In early July, biologists conducted aerial surveys of nearly 17,000 square miles, or 90 percent of the primary pronghorn range in the state. The statewide population was estimated to be about 15,000 animals – up 28 percent from 2004 – with an age and sex ratio of 37 bucks per 100 does and 65 fawns per 100 does. The overall increase in 2005 was due mostly to an extremely mild winter, and corresponding excellent adult and fawn survival.

Two unit changes were made for the 2005 season. Hunting units 4A and 4B southwest of Bowman were combined and designated as hunting unit 4A. The hunting season in unit 4A will be split to reduce hunter crowding and help ensure an adequate harvest.

Hunting unit 9C (portions of Oliver, Mercer and Morton counties) was expanded eastward to the Missouri River.

Last year, 2,272 hunters harvested 1,865 pronghorns, an 82 percent success rate. Bowhunting for pronghorn remains popular, as 1,331 archers harvested 213 animals for a 16 percent success rate.

BIGHORN SHEEP

Brett Wiedmann, Bighorn Sheep Biologist, Dickinson

North Dakota's four bighorn sheep license holders should have good hunting opportunities in 2005. Two licenses were issued in Unit B4 and one in Unit B1. The holder of North Dakota's auction license will be allowed to hunt in both units.

In 2004, the Game and Fish Department also issued two bighorn sheep licenses in Unit B4 and one in Unit B1. The 2004 auction license, sold by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, raised \$40,000 for North Dakota's bighorn management. All 2004 hunters harvested rams.

2005 has the potential to be an excellent year for lamb recruitment, as numerous lambs were observed through mid-June. However, more comprehensive lamb counts are planned.

In December 2004, 15 bighorns were transplanted from Oregon to two sites in North Dakota. Five sheep were released at Buckhorn Creek in an effort to augment a group of sheep translocated in 2003. Ten bighorns were also released near Red Wing Creek in an effort to establish a new herd near Theodore Roosevelt National Park's North Unit. Similar to the 2003 transplant, last year's effort was funded by the Minnesota-Wisconsin conservation group.

Last winter, Game and Fish Department biologists and volunteers conducted North Dakota's first bighorn sheep habitat improvement project. Select pockets of Rocky Mountain juniper were removed from a lambing area used by the Chateau herd. The trees were removed because bighorn sheep, when they are rearing young, require areas with high visibility, so they can see predators such as coyotes.



North Dakota's pronghorn license numbers jumped considerably in 2005.



ELK

Roger Johnson

The 2005 elk season should be similar to 2004, as license numbers remained the same.

The biggest change is an antlerless-elk-only season for Unit E1 in northeastern North Dakota. This one-time change was made to reduce harvest on mature bull elk due to low numbers. Elk surveys in both the Pembina Hills and Killdeer Mountain areas were completed in 2004-05 and elk numbers remain within management goals in these areas.

In 2004, 218 licensed hunters tagged 99 elk for a 48 percent success rate. Hunter success in 2003 was 52 percent.

The Theodore Roosevelt National Park science team is in the process of formulating an environment assessment plan for managing a growing elk population in the park's south unit.

Elk hunting in North Dakota remains one of the toughest hunts.



CRAIG BHRLE

FURBEARERS

Dorothy Fecske

Furbearer/Wildlife Disease Biologist

Spring surveys show an increase in coyote numbers north and east of the Missouri River, and lower numbers in the Missouri Slope Region between the Missouri River and the badlands.

Overall, the number of coyotes harvested and pelts sold to fur buyers are up from last year and the percentage of animals taken with mange has declined. Not so for red fox, where mange has increased slightly. Although the fox harvest has increased from last year, the number of pelts sold has decreased. Like coyote, fox numbers are down in the Missouri Slope Region. Fox numbers are about the same in the Red River Valley and have increased in the Missouri Coteau and Drift Prairie regions.

Raccoon and beaver harvests were up last year, but not so for muskrats and skunks. The number of muskrats harvested and sold continues to decline and muskrat numbers have increased slightly from last year, with greatest densities in the drift prairie region, although the population is still low compared to past years. Skunk densities remain about the same, or have decreased slightly statewide, and fewer skunk pelts were sold to fur buyers last year.

Some of the less common furbearers appear to be making a comeback in North Dakota. An increasing number of river otter sightings have been reported along the Red River in eastern North Dakota, and along the Missouri River System, mainly Lake Sakakawea. Fishers have been sighted in the northeastern corner of the state, where a few animals also have been killed by vehicles. Swift foxes, if not here already, may be headed our way from eastern Montana, where they were recently reintroduced. A population survey is planned in 2006 to determine if they are present in

western North Dakota. Wolf sightings have increased in recent years, although no breeding population has been documented in North Dakota. Wolves are considered endangered and are protected.

The mountain lion has made front page news more than once the past year. Historically, mountain lions were found in the North Dakota badlands and occasionally reported in other areas of the state. Lion sightings have increased in recent years. Expansion into North Dakota likely is occurring from established populations in South Dakota and Montana.

During the past year, one young male lion that was radio-collared for research in the Black Hills of South Dakota traveled through North Dakota and into Minnesota. Two young female lions also were killed last year in the badlands; one shot by a bowhunter who felt threatened by the cat, and another was captured in a snare.

To learn more about the lion population, the Department has initiated an experimental hunting season. A quota of five animals – a limit of one per hunter – can be taken during the statewide season. The season will begin September 2, coinciding with opening day of deer and pronghorn bow season, and end on March 12, 2006. Any lion taken must be reported within 12 hours and the entire animal submitted to the Department. Legally taken animals will be returned to the hunter following analysis.

Experimental seasons are just that, experiments, and the season may be closed next year should harvest results indicate North Dakota cannot support a sustainable lion harvest.

2005-06 HUNTING SEASON DETAILS

SNIPE	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 17
Closes:	Nov. 27
Daily Limit:	8
Possession Limit:	16
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 10
Closes:	Jan. 8
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

TREE SQUIRRELS	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 10
Closes:	Jan. 8
Daily Limit:	4
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Tree squirrels may be taken only with firearms loaded with shot, rimfire and muzzle-loading firearms, or with bow and arrows legal for taking upland game.

WOODCOCK	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 24
Closes:	Nov. 6
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	6
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

CANADA GEESE (September Season)	
Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 1
Closes:	Sept. 15
Daily Limit:	5
Possession Limit:	10
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Besides possessing the required licenses, hunters must be HIP certified. Residents and nonresidents are eligible to hunt.

Nonresidents who hunt during this season in Sargent and Richland counties may do so without counting against their 14-day, or two seven-day hunting period restrictions.

CROWS	
Open Area:	Statewide
Fall Season	Opens: Aug. 13
	Closes: Oct. 23
Spring Season	Opens: Mar. 18
	Closes: Apr. 30
Daily Limit:	There is no limit on crows.
Possession Limit:	
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

In addition to the crow season, crows may be taken when committing or about to commit depredations as specified in Federal law (50CFR21.43).

COCK PHEASANT		
Open Area:	*Regular Season	**Delayed Opener
Opens:	Oct. 8	Oct. 22
Closes:	Jan. 8	Jan. 8
Daily Limit:	3	
Possession Limit:	12	
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset	

ONLY MALE PHEASANTS MAY BE TAKEN

*Regular season is statewide except for Delayed Opener area.

**Delayed Opener includes area in Williams and McKenzie counties starting where BN Railroad enters North Dakota, then east on the railroad tracks to the west boundary of the Trenton Wildlife Management Area (southwest of Trenton) then south and east on the boundary of the Trenton WMA to the Missouri River, then directly across the river, then west to the Yellowstone River, then south and west on the Yellowstone River to the Montana border, then north to the point of origin.

As per legislative action, nonresidents cannot hunt any game from October 8 through October 14 on North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas or on Conservation Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) areas.

RUFFED GROUSE	
Opens:	Sept. 10
Closes:	Jan. 8
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Bottineau, Rolette, Cavalier, Pembina and Walsh counties in North Dakota. Also that portion of the J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge in McHenry County lying south of the Upham-Willow City Road is open to ruffed grouse hunting.



SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Opens:	Sept.10
Closes:	Jan. 8
Daily Limit:	3
Possession Limit:	12
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Statewide except for that portion of North Dakota bordered on the west by ND No. 32, on the north by the Sheyenne River, on the south by N.D. Highway 11 and on the east by the Red and Bois de Sioux Rivers, and an area in Grand Forks County bordered on the east by the Red River, the south by US Highway 2, the west by ND Highway 18 and the north by the Walsh and Grand Forks county line. Both areas are closed to sharp-tailed grouse hunting.

MOURNING DOVES

Open Area:	Statewide
Opens:	Sept. 1
Closes:	Oct. 30
Daily Limit:	15
Possession Limit:	30
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

It is illegal to hunt doves or other birds resting on utility lines or fixtures adjacent to such lines.

SANDHILL CRANES

Open Area:	UNIT 1	UNIT 2
Opens:	Sept. 17	Sept. 17
Closes:	Nov. 13	Oct. 23
Daily Limit:	3	2
Possession Limit:	6	4
Shooting Hours:	1 pm CDT Sept. 17 thru Oct. 30 1/2 hour before sunrise to: 2 pm CST Oct. 31 thru Nov. 13	

Unit 1. That portion of North Dakota west of US Highway 281.

Unit 2. That portion of North Dakota east of US Highway 281.

Hunters may not aggregate daily bag or possession limits from the two units. (A hunter may take up to 3 cranes in one day, provided all 3 birds are taken from Unit 1, or no more than 2 birds are taken from Unit 2.)

In addition to other licenses required, sandhill crane hunters must possess a \$5 sandhill crane hunting permit available from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office.

It is unlawful to shoot from open water or from a boat or other floating vessel in open water while hunting sandhill cranes.

SAGE GROUSE

Opens:	Sept. 26
Closes:	Sept. 28
Daily Limit:	1
Possession Limit:	1
Shooting Hours:	1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Open Area – Area south of Interstate 94 and west of U.S. Highway 85 in southwestern North Dakota.

BEAVER HUNTING, TRAPPING AND UNDERWATER SNARING

Open year-round (Officially from Apr.1 – Mar. 31 of each year)

BEAVER SNARING ON LAND

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** May 7

From March 13, 2006 through May 7, 2006, snares must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no greater than 4 inches off the ground and they must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 or less inches in diameter.

Beaver dams may be dismantled when their presence causes property damage.

MINK AND WEASEL TRAPPING

Opens: Oct. 22 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

MINK AND WEASEL SNARING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

WEASEL HUNTING

Opens: Oct. 22 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

Weasels may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzle-loaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows, and crossbows.

MUSKRAT TRAPPING

Opens: Oct. 22 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

MUSKRAT SNARING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or snares; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

In addition, muskrats may be trapped statewide with foothold traps or colony traps using underwater sets that are at least 2 inches under water or trapped with conibear-type traps or snared with no more than 2 inches of the conibear trap or snare above the water surface from March 13, 2006 through May 7, 2006. During this time period, float-sets are prohibited, and trapping or snaring on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited.

MUSKRAT HUNTING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** May 7

MINK HUNTING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

Mink and muskrat may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzle-loaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows and crossbows.

BOBCAT – HUNTING, TRAPPING

Opens: Nov. 5 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

BOBCAT SNARING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

Open only in the area south and west of the Missouri River.

The pelt and carcass of each bobcat must be presented to Game and Fish Department personnel for inspection and tagging prior to sale or transfer of possession, but no later than 14 days after the close of the season. Absolutely no bobcat pelt will be tagged until the animal is skinned and presented with the intact carcass. The carcass then becomes the property of the Department. No fur dealer shall possess or purchase an untagged bobcat.

RED FOX, GRAY FOX, COYOTE, RACCOON AND BADGER HUNTING OR TRAPPING

Open year-round (officially from Apr. 1 – Mar. 31 of each year)

In addition, red fox, gray fox, and coyote may be hunted at any hour, from November 19, 2005 through March 19, 2006. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox, or coyote during the time from 1/2 hour after sunset to 1/2 hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot and use a predator call. The use of a spotlight or any other artificial light is prohibited.

RED FOX, GRAY FOX, COYOTE, RACCOON AND BADGER SNARING

Opens: Nov. 19 – **Closes:** Mar. 12

WATERFOWL SEASON DATES

Early Canada Goose Season

Opens: Thursday, September 1
Closes: Thursday, September 15
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset
Bag limit: Five Canada geese daily, 10 in possession

Note: Nonresidents can hunt during the early Canada goose season in Sargent and Richland counties without counting against their 14-day regular season period. Nonresidents who hunt in other counties during this season would have at least a seven-day period count against their 14-day license.

Youth Waterfowl Season

(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger)
Opens: September 17
Closes: September 18
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset
Bag limit: Same as for regular duck and goose season.

Regular Duck Season

Low Plains Unit:
Opens: Saturday, September 24 (residents only), October 1 (nonresidents)
Closes: Sunday, December 4
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

High Plains Unit

Opens: Saturday, September 24 (residents only), October 1 (nonresidents)
Closes: Sunday, December 4
Opens: Saturday, December 10
Closes: Sunday, Jan. 1
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset

Daily limits: Six ducks, which may include five mallards (two hens), two scaup, two redhead, two wood duck, one pintail and one canvasback (pintail and canvasback season is open only from September 24 to November 1). Possession limit is twice the daily limit.

The High Plains Unit is the portion of North Dakota that, starting at the South Dakota border, is west and south of a line beginning with U.S. Highway 83 and I-94 to Wilton, then following ND Highway 41 to ND 53, then west on 53 back to US 83, then north to U.S. Highway 2, then west to the Williams County line, then north and west along the Williams and Divide county lines to the Canadian border. The Low Plains Unit is that portion of North Dakota east of the High Plains Unit.

Canada Geese

Statewide
Opens: Saturday, September 24 (residents only), October 1 (nonresidents)
Closes: Thursday, December 22
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through October 29. Starting October 30, shooting hours 1/2 hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day. Exception: shooting hours for Canada geese and white-fronted geese are 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays during the season.
Daily limit: Three Canada geese daily and possession limit is six.

White-Fronted Geese

Statewide
Opens: Saturday, September 24 (residents only), October 1 (nonresidents)
Closes: Sunday, December 18
Shooting hours: Same as for Canada geese
Daily limit: Two geese, possession limit is four.

Light (Snow) Geese

Statewide
Opens: Saturday, September 24 (residents only), October 1 (nonresidents)
Closes: Thursday, December 22
Shooting hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through October 30. Starting October 31, shooting hours 1/2 hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day.
Daily limit: 20. There is no possession limit for light geese.

For additional information, see the Department's website at discovernd.com/gnf, or pick up a copy of the 2005 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.